

Dig Deeper, Jimmy!

The story on Soviet developments in applying new high-energy physics technology to directed-energy weapons research in last week's issue of AVIATION WEEK & SPACE TECHNOLOGY has produced the standard crop of official denials (see p. 13).

"This sounds like the stuff we put out right after Sputnik," one Pentagon veteran noted after phoning us the text of the official Defense Dept. statement. However, there is a thinner web of ambiguity in these statements than usual and heavier use of the old technique of denying statements we never made and that cannot be found in our text.

The resultant international daily newspaper, radio and television coverage of the AVIATION WEEK story also finally introduced President Carter to the subject. This was one of our motives in disclosing the story at this time. However, it is apparent from his response that his acquaintance with the subject is extremely recent and his initial briefers were less than complete. President Carter stated in his reply to a question from David Broder of the Washington Post (see page 13) that the "report is based on some inaccuracies." Obviously, President Carter's briefers did not tell him that the AVIATION WEEK story had been offered to the appropriate Pentagon officials for review for both accuracy and security well before publication. Some changes were requested by the Pentagon on security and some, but not all, were made. None was requested on accuracy.

So in all fairness, we challenge President Carter to produce the specifics on his alleged inaccuracies. We will be glad to print them, and we suspect that the rest of the American press will do likewise. If we are wrong, we will so acknowledge. We do this routinely in the pages of this magazine in a box clearly labeled "Correction." But if President Carter is wrong, he owes it to the American people to say so and not hide behind the awesome facade of his office to issue indefensible generalities. The American people have had enough of this from his predecessors.

However, we also suggest that President Carter, with his stated high moral purpose and his demonstrated ability to probe deeply into the energy maze and the welfare mess, dig far deeper than the National Security Council briefings to find out the truth of what is now transpiring in high-energy physics technology, both in the Soviet Union and this country; listen to all sides of the vigorous subterranean debate now being waged in scientific-military circles, and above all spend some time with the brilliant young physicists who are upsetting the traditions of their elders. Then he should judge for himself what import all this has for the future of this nation and the world.

As we noted in our original story on the subject, the Soviets are still years away from turning their current test developments into a usable weapon. President Carter still has time to penetrate the cloak of official secrecy that has wrapped these developments and determine for himself what needs to be done in the time remaining before the Soviets are able to field a directed-energy weapon. How deeply he penetrates to

the factual grass roots of this astonishing technical turn of events will determine a great deal about the future of the world. He still has time, but whether he will use it wisely is the question the American people must ask.

President Carter is not the first American president to be screened from vital technical developments by the post-war security bureaucracy that grew up in the hierarchies of the Central Intelligence Agency and Defense Intelligence Agency, where everything was squeezed down to the lowest common denominator through the agreed national intelligence estimates. Twenty years ago we fulminated on these pages at President Eisenhower because he was ignoring the intelligence gathered by the U.S. radars in Turkey on the growing scope and pace of the initial Soviet ballistic missile development, and we broke the story of that radar operation to prove that the threat was real. After the storm subsided, we found that in fact President Eisenhower had not been told of the radar-gathered intelligence on the initiative of his national security adviser, Bobby Cutler of Boston. He learned about it only when the daily newspapers front-paged the AVIATION WEEK & SPACE TECHNOLOGY Turkish radar story. Bobby Cutler's excuse was that he did not wish to disturb the President with bad news after his heart attack. What the then Defense Secretary "Engine Charlie" Wilson's excuse was for slashing U.S. missile development in the face of this intelligence he never disclosed, but U.S. policy changed, missile development accelerated and the Soviets were temporarily left far behind.

More recently, President Ford was given performance data based on deliberately selective intelligence on the Soviet Backfire bomber to bolster Henry Kissinger's preconceived SALT 2 position. Then we noted that the Backfire data had been altered in several aspects for the CIA study designed to reduce its range to fit Kissinger's SALT position. CIA Director George Bush and Kissinger issued official denials. Subsequent investigation showed that in fact seven basic alterations were made to the data submitted to McDonnell Douglas by the CIA. With access to all of the available Backfire data, McDonnell Douglas subsequently did another study that clearly documented the Backfire's intercontinental capability and verified four previous studies done by the Royal Air Force, Boeing, Rockwell and General Dynamics without the CIA data selection.

So President Carter has ample ground to be skeptical of his official intelligence bureaucracy. With a trusted friend and military scholar now at the helm of the CIA, his task in penetrating the bureaucratic mush could be more successful. But he must make an extraordinary effort to get through this maze of obfuscation whose record of error and failure is a national disgrace and a continuing danger to this nation. So we urge President Carter to dig deep in search of the facts on which to base his judgment. If he does not this, he will be confronted with the disaster of nuclear blackmail.

—Robert Hotz

U.S. Discounts Threat of Soviet Antimissile Beam

The possibility that the Soviet Union "has achieved a breakthrough" in directing an energy beam to destroy missiles "is considered remote," the Pentagon said yesterday.

Thomas B. Ross, assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, issued that statement in response to an Aviation Week & Space Technology magazine story which said the Soviets are far along in developing a beam of charged particles to destroy missiles and "are preparing to test" an anti-satellite laser in space.

"U.S. officials are coming to a conclusion that a decisive turn in the balance of strategic power is in the making," the magazine said in its May 2 issue, "which could tip that balance heavily in the Soviets' favor through charged-particle beam development and the development of energetic strategic laser weapons."

The magazine did not name any U.S. officials who had come to that conclusion. Editor Robert Hotz, in an introductory editorial, said that recently retired Air Force intelligence chief Maj. Gen. George J. Keegan Jr. had helped verify Soviet advances in "a directed-energy beam weapon."

Keegan has been sounding the alarm in numerous public appearances since leaving the Air Force about the Soviet military threat, including beam technology. Aviation Week & Space Technology said the Central Intelligence Agency had rejected Keegan's conclusion, presented while in office, that Soviet "beam weapons development is evident."

Ross, after checking yesterday with Defense Secretary Harold Brown, said in his statement:

"Senior officials of the Department of Defense do not believe that the Soviet Union has achieved a breakthrough in research which could soon provide a directed energy beam weapon capable of neutralizing ballistic missile weapons. Based on all information now available to the U.S. intelligence community, this possibility is considered remote."